



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hundreds of Community Members Learn How to Help Struggling Families at “Be The End” Community Event

Poteau, OK (June 12, 2014) – In just two hours, nearly 500 individuals learned about how it takes an entire community to support struggling families and 100 people committed to providing support to local children and families during the Communities of Care “Be The End” event in Poteau last week. Garnering this community support was the goal of the more than 28 local service agencies that hosted the event for Leflore, Latimer and Haskell counties. Their efforts will result in stronger families and stronger communities.

The forum, hosted by Communities of Care, Leflore County Child Advocacy Center, Southern Star and the Choctaw Nation, was the third of six to be offered in southeastern Oklahoma as part of the Communities of Care initiative kick-off events. The goal of the initiative is to raise awareness about the number of families struggling through traumatic events in local communities. Initiative members also are emphasizing the importance of helping fragile families on the front end before the family structure weakens to the point of children being taken into foster care.

In addition to the live entertainment, food and prizes for the whole family, the event included guest speakers who told their stories of what it meant to be part of a struggling family and how community support helps families rise above difficult times. Speakers included Pam Toohey, nationally renowned speaker and child advocate, and Jesse Pacheco Director of the Choctaw Nation *Hokli Nittak* program.

Communities of Care representative Deanna Chancellor, Executive Director of Leflore County Child Advocacy Center and Women’s Crisis Services of Leflore County, said those in attendance became aware of how working together to help struggling families is beneficial to the whole community. “All of the agencies involved feel those who attended the event left with a better understanding of what community services are available locally and how even the smallest commitment of their own time and resources can help strengthen our community,” Chancellor commented.

Some of the comments on the commitment forms included, “My husband and I are new to this community and I didn’t know this community had these resources for families,” “I plan on sharing the information that I have received today with others,” “create opportunities for more community involvement” and “I am going to find my place and learn how to best serve them.”

According to Casey White, Communications Manager for the Department of Human Services, “These are great commitments and they show that a day, a week or a year of someone’s time can make a difference. The event may be over but Communities of Care will continue to work to help everyone understand that the entire community must work together to create strong families and keep our children out of the foster care system, or safe while they are in the system. Communities of Care will continue to engage in a variety of efforts that promote healthy families and healthy communities across the state for a long time to come.”

Families are the most basic building block of any community and the statistics in eastern Oklahoma indicate there are high numbers of children and families at risk for experiencing some type of stress that can lead to children entering the foster care system.

In eastern Oklahoma alone, in 2013, there were 1,498 confirmed reports of child abuse and neglect representing 2,781 children. An overwhelming 60 percent of those children were age 0 to 6. This is an increase of nearly 20 percent over 2012. Approximately 70 percent of adults and 40 percent of youth are not being treated for mental health issues and 77 percent of adults and 80 percent of youth need help for substance abuse problems.

Further statistics show that for eastern Oklahoma, in 2013, more children entered foster care than there were approved beds. With only 1,761 approved beds, 2,217 children were removed from their homes and placed into the system. This startling statistic represents 21 percent of the total number of children in Oklahoma removed from their family and is a 23 percent increase over 2012.

To make a commitment of time or resources and join with others in strengthening the community, information about the Communities of Care initiative and its goals can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OKCommunitiesofcare or by calling (918) 647-3814.

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Local Agency Hosts of Be the End Leflore County

Southern Star

Choctaw Nation Family Services

Choctaw Nation Voices of Survivors

Choctaw Nation Project Safe

Central National Bank

Leflore County Child Advocacy Network

Women's Crisis Services of Leflore County

Grace Cottage

D & D Counseling

Sequel Care

Leflore County Systems of Care

Leflore County Department of Human Services Child Welfare and Family Services

Pervasive Parenting Center

Catholic Charities

Leflore County District Attorney's Office

KI BOIS

Smart Start Oklahoma

Health Authority

Boys and Girls Club of Leflore County

Choice Pregnancy Center

Leflore County Youth Services

Leflore County Medical Reserve Corps

Health Department-Child First

Eastern Oklahoma Medical Center

Poteau Police Department

Patrick Lynch Public Library Friends Inc.

Health and Wellness